

Dear Legislators and Respected Officials,

I recognize that I am sending this in a bit beyond the deadline, but I hope you will read it and consider the message and plea for support. I am the mother of a 30 year old daughter with mental retardation. We live in West Hartford, where my daughter Emily benefitted from the inclusive and stimulating educational system. Upon graduating at age 21, Emily's opportunities have diminished considerably. She spends a good portion of her day at home, watching TV and waiting for her parents to plan her next social event. Emily is fortunate to have a job at HARC that provides her with a much needed level of independence and purpose during the hours of 9-2pm Monday through Friday. The remaining hours of her life are spent at home under the supervision of her parents. Unlike most other 30 year olds, she does not drive, she has few friends, and she relies heavily on her parents for her care and recreation. As Emily get's older, her dependence on her parents has increased significantly. Over the years I have seen her slowly regress both socially and intellectually. She is fearful of going out without her mother and takes very little initiative to engage with a peer group. It leaves me feeling sad and fearful of what will become of her. Emily is a beautiful and caring young woman and it saddens me to see that she is being prevented from reaching her potential because of the insufficient funding for residential support in the state of Connecticut.

I have some personal history with residential supports in Connecticut. When I was a student at the University of Connecticut in the 70's, I volunteered and worked as an employee of Mansfield Training School. I was the student liaison of the volunteer tutorial program that served some of their higher level clients, and later worked as a floating aide working in all of the different residential buildings. I learned a lot through this experience, with the most important lesson being that no human being should live in a residence such as this. I remember the excitement and pride that I felt when the doors of Mansfield were closed and clients were sent out in the community with the supports they needed to thrive. Throughout the years I have remained in touch with one client, Hazel McNeal, who truly was able to reach her potential once given the opportunity to live in a community with peers. She was happy, independent, and productive and it was evident she felt good about herself and her accomplishments. During recent years, Hazel encouraged me to get Emily into a supported living arrangement. Even though Emily was not at Mansfield, her growth was being restricted by her environment. Imagine how powerful a message this was to hear this from a former Mansfield Training School resident. The closing of Mansfield Training School was a proud and significant landmark in the fight for rights and recognition for individuals with disabilities. In the 70's the State of Connecticut supported this movement and supported the individuals that were directly impacted. Sadly slightly more that thirty years later, the State has forgotten these individuals, who now remain at home, for better or for worse, and no one seems to care. I urge you to please OPEN that door once again, provide the monetary supports needed to help families and our very special citizens live a life of dignity and respect. As a mother of a very special young lady, I am willing to work with you, but I simply can't do it alone. Please give my daughter Emily the opportunity given to young people like Hazel McNeal thirty years ago. It is the moral and right decision. With sincere gratitude.

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